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"HARLEQUIN" AND "HURLY-BURLY"

Of the word "hurly-burly" the Oxford Dictionary knows no earlier instance than the year 1540. It derives the word from "hurl," to move with violence. Of "hurl" it gives no origin, and finds no instance before the fourteenth century. "Harlequin" it derives (with what seems to me unnecessary hesitation) from the Old French *Herlequin* or *Hellequin*, the leader of a troop of furious and vociferous night-riding demons or spectres — the *maisné Herlequin*, or *Hennequin* of popular legend. It apparently suspects no connection between *harlequin* and *hurly-burly*.

Skeat, fixing his attention on the form *Hellequin*, suspects a connection with *hell*; but this is unlikely, as *Herlequin* — in Latin *Herlechinus* — is the older form; and in phonetic change it is much easier to lose an *r* than to gain one.¹ We find the name in the English form *Hurlewayne*, in *Richard the Redeles* (fourteenth century) where a band of lawless ruffians are said to be "of Hurlewayne's Kynne." Also in the *Pardonere and Tapstere* (fifteenth century) a company of lewd knaves who care neither for holiness nor chivalry, are likened to "Hurlewaynes meyné." I think these two words, connoting furious motion and loud noise or uproar, have a common origin, and that through *Harlequin*.

The earliest mention of the name that I have been able to find, occurs in Ordericus Vitalis (1075-1142), who tells us of a vision or spectral show beheld by a Norman priest named Walkelin, in the year 1091. Walkelin saw a troop of the damned riding and walking with hideous noise and uproar, and it came into his mind that they were the household of Herlechin — "Herlechini familia," of which he had often heard tell, but which he had never seen. This shows that the name and the tradition were popular as early at least as the end of the eleventh century.

Now as for the spectral night-hunt, we find it in the Anglo-

¹ All the texts given in Godefrey, where *hellequin* or *hinlekin* appear, are of the last half of the thirteenth century.

Saxon Chronicle, and in Ælfric, before the Norman conquest; and I dare say it could be traced much further back, if one took the pains to look. In both these narratives the spectres are lost souls punished for hunting during Lent. But they are anonymous; and my interest is confined to the word *harlequin* and its origin.

I will now for a short time leave the twelfth century and come down to the fifteenth to look at a curious story in which we shall meet our friend in a new aspect. In the *Chronique de Normandie* [1487] (cited in Michel's edition of Benoît's *Chron. des Ducs de Normandie*, II. 336) we have the following singular story:

Another very marvellous adventure happened to the Duke Richard Sans Peur. He was in his castle of Moulineaux sur Somme, and on a time when he went forth after supper to walk in the woods, he and his men heard a marvellous noise and a horrible, as it seemed of a great multitude. This tumult ever drew nearer, and when the Duke and his men heard it close at hand, they hid behind a tree, and the Duke sent one of his people to spy out what it was. Then one of the squires perceived that those who made this uproar had halted under a tree; whereupon he watched their doings and their government, and saw that it was a King who had with him a great company of men of all sorts; and they are called in common speech, the *mesnie Hennequin*. But in truth it was the miené of Charles V, whilom King of France.

When the King and his meiné who made that noise had departed, the squire returned to Duke Richard and told him the whole affair, and the behaviour which he had seen of the meiné which made this tumult.

And this adventure happened constantly thrice a week in the forest of Moulineaux hard by the castle. Then Duke Richard thought that if he might, he would know what people they were who held such assemblies on the land without his leave given. Whereupon he summoned his trustiest knights to the number of a hundred, or six score, of the prowtest and boldest that he could find in all Normandy, and told them how on his lands, hard by his castle of Moulineaux, in the evening twilight, there came from time to time a King accom-

panied by persons of many sorts, who made a marvellous great noise and a horrible, and rested them under a tree. And he commanded them that they should arm themselves and go with him to watch and learn what manner of men they were. And the knights answered that they would go with him right willingly, and neither in life nor in death would they forsake him.

So it befell that the said Richard Sans Peur and his knights came to Moulineaux and made their ambush in the forest close to the tree under which the King and his meiné had halted. And of a sudden, as evening drew on, and it was the hour between dog and wolf, they heard so great a noise and so horrible that they wondered. And they beheld how two men took a cloth of many colours, as it seemed to them, which they spread upon the earth, and arranged seats as if about to hold a royal sitting. And thereupon they beheld coming a King accompanied by people of divers sorts, who made a marvellous great noise; and this King seated himself in the royal seat, and the rest did obeisance to him and served him as befitted a King. But all the knights of Duke Richard took so great an affright and horror of fear, that they fled this way and that, and left the Duke alone. And when Duke Richard beheld that all his knights had fled in disarray like men distraught, he said in his heart that it should never be cast as a reproach to him that *he* had fled. And he looked and saw that the King was sitting on the cloth in the royal seat, with his meiné about him, under the great tree. Then the Duke Richard leapt with both his feet [upon the cloth] and adjured the King by the name of God to tell him who he was, and who were the people with him, and what he sought upon his land.

Then the King Charles V and all his meiné when they found themselves compelled and adjured by the holy name of God — the King said to Duke Richard: 'I am King Charles the Fifth of France, who died in this region, and I suffer penance for the sins that I wrought in this world; and these are the souls of my knights and others who served with me, who also suffer penance according to their sins.' 'Whither go ye?' asked Duke Richard. The King said: 'We go to combat against the unbelieving Saracens and damned souls, to accomplish our penance.' Then said Duke Richard: 'And

when will ye return?' The King said: 'We shall return about the dawning of the day; and all the night we shall combat with them. Suffer us to go.' 'That will I not,' said Duke Richard, 'for I am minded to go with you and help you in the combat.' Then said the King: 'Whatever thou seest, loose not thy hold on the piece of cloth on which thou art, but hold it fast.' 'So will I do,' said Duke Richard; 'and now let us go.'

Then the said Richard Sans Peur, and the King and his meiné, set forth, making great tumult and storm. And when the hour of midnight was come, the said Richard heard the sound of a bell, as it were in an abbey; so he asked where was the bell ringing, and in what land was he? The King said that it was matins that they were ringing in the church of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai. And the Duke Richard who had all his life been wont to go to church, said to the King that he would fain go thither, to hear matins. Then the King said to him: 'Hold fast this piece of cloth and have a care that you keep always fast hold of it; then go to the church and pray for us, and at your coming forth we will come for you.'

So the Duke took the piece of cloth that the King had given him, and entered in the church of St. Catherine of Mount Sinai where matins were beginning, and there kneeling he prayed to God and to Madame St. Catherine; and when his prayer was ended, he went about the church, where he beheld much riches and many relics and marvellous things, such as neck-irons and other shackles for prisoners. And when he entered into the chapel founded by the glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God, he saw a knight, a kinsman of his own, who was within, and serving for his livelihood, for he had been seven years a prisoner in the hands of the Saracens; but a religious man of the church had pledged himself to keep him in prison. Then went Duke Richard to him, and asked him how he fared, and why he was serving there. Then the knight answered that seven years before he had been taken by the Saracens; but a holy man therein had pledged himself for him to keep him in prison, for he had not wherewithal to ransom him, or to exchange man for man. Thereupon the Duke asked him if he had any message for his wife and his household; and the knight asked to be com-

mended to his wife. Then the Duke told him that his wife was betrothed again, and was to wed within three days, and that he would himself be at the spousal, if it pleased God, for so he had promised. Thereupon the knight besought the Duke that he would tell his wife that he was yet living. 'She will not believe me,' said Duke Richard. 'But she will,' said the knight. 'And tell her by this token that when I parted from her, I took from her finger her wedding-ring and broke it into two pieces, whereof one I left with her, and the other I have, which you shall carry to her as a token.' 'So shall it be,' said the Duke; 'and I will tell her furthermore that I shall strive to gain your deliverance.' . . .

After a time the Duke heard the King and his *meiné* arrive; so he bade farewell to the knight and issuing forth from the church, found there the King and his *meiné*, who had returned so forfoughten, battered, and hacked, that it was a wonder to see. Then the Duke took his piece of cloth, and sprang forth with the King and his *meiné*, and they went careering like wind and tempest. But as it drew toward the dawning of the day, the Duke was overcome with sleep, and when he awoke he found himself in the forest of Moulineaux, under the tree where he had first seen the King and his company, of whom he now saw nothing. Then did he return thanks to God, by whose grace he had come back in safety."

The Chronicle then goes on to tell how he delivered the ring to the lady, and on his prayer the two pieces immediately joined and became one. The Duke ordered a solemn service for the souls of the King and his *meiné*, and also obtained the captive knight's freedom.

It is pretty clear to me that this is not, in this form, a folk-tale. There was an earlier story that Duke Richard, going to pray in a chapel, saw a corpse lying on a bed. This corpse, being animated by a devil, made a violent assault on the Duke, who overcame the fiend and bound him.² But this has no connection with any night-riders. Now the clerk of our Chronicle, anxious to exalt the prowess of his hero, thought it a good thing

² Robert of Gloucester makes William the Conqueror refer to this exploit in his speech before the battle of Hastings.

to confront him with the terrific *meiné Herlequin*. This might have gone off very well, had he not had an unhappy turn for etymology. It flashed on him like an inspiration that *Hennequin* or *Harlequin* was an obvious corruption of *Charles Quint*. Etymologists have been unlucky before, but I think the infelicity of this it would be hard to match. The King who for his crimes is compelled to this ghastly and sanguinary penance, was the first King of France, after Merovingian times, who never headed an army; the wise and cautious King whose prudence and skill saved France from impending destruction; who did not die in Normandy in battle, but in his bed in Paris, and who was not born until four hundred years after Duke Richard was dead.

I now go back to the twelfth century where I think we may strike the trail of the word nearer its origin. My authority is Walter Map, Archdeacon of Oxford, one of the brightest lights of Henry the Second's splendid court. He is associated in a good many minds with the "Goliath" poems, and with the Grail legend; but with neither of these had he any more to do than I have. But he is indisputably the author of the treatise *De Nugis Curialium*, a curious and interesting miscellany. Map is a living man, and not a mere pen and ink-horn like too many of his contemporaries. I have a great regard for Map, notwithstanding the fact that he hated the harmless Cistercians worse than poison; and notwithstanding the fact that he wrote a tractate *De non ducenda uxore* (a sort of sixth satire of Juvenal with some of the scarlet washed out), a treatise which, as you will remember, so enraged the Wife of Bath—whose sympathies ran in the opposite direction—that she tore three leaves out of it; and notwithstanding the fact that he was an archdeacon. I trust that in his case the question which caused John of Salisbury such searchings of heart: '*An possit archidiaconus salvus esse,*' has received a favourable answer. Map has recorded the following strange story—(I greatly condense):

There was, in very ancient times, a King of the Britons, named Herla. Before him there came one day a man of dwarfish stature hairy and goat-footed, who announced that he

was a king over many kings and peoples; that moved by the fame of Herla's greatness he had come to ask to be invited to his (Herla's) wedding. “For, though thou knowest it not, the king of the Franks offers thee his daughter in marriage, and his ambassadors will be here to-day. Let us make a perpetual alliance: I will come to thy wedding and do thou come to mine a year thereafter.” So saying he departed. The ambassadors came. The wedding was arranged, and on the day the Dwarf-King appeared with an innumerable retinue. In an instant a vast space was covered with magnificent pavilions, in which servants gorgeously attired, set out a banquet of the richest dishes and rarest wines in vessels of gold and jewels, with splendour such as the mind of man had not conceived. After the feast, the Dwarf-King took leave of Herla, reminding him of his engagement.

When the year had expired, he appeared again to guide Herla and his company to his own kingdom. Passing through a cavern, they came at last to the Dwarf-King's resplendent palace in a land where the light was neither of sun nor stars. Here the nuptials were celebrated with great splendour and festivity, after which Herla and his companions, were dismissed, laden with magnificent gifts. The Dwarf-King conducted them to the cavern, and there took his leave, first giving Herla *canem modicum sanguinarium portatilem*—which I take to mean “a small portable bloodhound”—with the injunction that it should be carried by one of his train, and that under no circumstances should any one alight from his horse until the dog sprang down.

When they emerged from the cavern to the light of day, Herla asked of an old shepherd the way to his place, mentioning the name of the queen. The shepherd had great difficulty in understanding him, but at last he said: “Sir, you seem to me a Briton, and I am a Saxon. I bethink me that I have heard some old story of such a queen, the wife of a King Herla, who disappeared and was never seen again. But all that happened in dim, far-away times. The Saxons drove out the Britons two hundred years ago.” At hearing this, some of the company, forgetting the dwarf's warning, sprang from their

horses, and instantly crumbled to dust. At this, Herla commanded that nobody should alight until the dog had jumped down. "The dog has not jumped down yet," adds the arch-deacon.

Left in this parlous state, there was nothing for Herla and his *meiné* to do but to keep riding about through all the centuries.

I think we have here a genuine Welsh folk-tale of high antiquity. Its inconsequence and absence of any moral lesson are very significant. In all other legends of the Wild Hunt that I have read, the doom is a punishment inflicted for ruthlessness, or blood-guiltiness, or violation of the ordinances of the Church. But here there is no intimation that Herla had been guilty of anything. In Christian times, if a man was given over to the powers of darkness, it was because he had incurred the wrath of God. In early pagan times the powers of the other world neither punished nor rewarded — their curses and their blessings were alike arbitrary — their doings have the inconsequence of a dream.

To the Welsh apprehension the other world was something like the speculative mathematician's notion of a fourth dimension in space — it is close to us, yet we cannot perceive it; we do not know where it is; in fact, "whereness" cannot be predicated of it. If we could get into it, we should find all natural laws changed or reversed. So with the Keltic Other World — it is near this, yet imperceptible, though irruptions are sometimes made from one side or the other. In the Other World there is no time — years, and ages, and hours are one — or rather do not exist at all. Those who return from it may come back as young as they entered it; or they may find themselves suddenly grown old; or they may return, like Herla, dead and pulverised without knowing it.

I think, then, that the name Herla belongs to an ancient Welsh folk-tale, and has come down from an exceedingly remote time. As an imp or phantom of swift motion and unexpected appearance, he found his way into the Italian popular drama as the nimble and fantastic Harelquin; as a terrifying demon, Hurlewayn has given us Hellwain, the name of a devil in six-

teenth century drama; while the root of Hurlewayne, as connoting tumult and uproar, has given us by reduplication (as in *knick-knack*, *hodge-podge*, etc.) *hurly-burly*. At least I shall think so until better informed.

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